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RECENT EDUCATIONAL SPEECHES IN ENGLAND.

1. LORD JOHN RUSSELL.

EDUCATION, WHAT IT IS—ITS DESIRABLENESS, AND PROSPECTS IN ENGLAND.

The annual sittings of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, were opened at Liverpool on Monday, 11th October, by an address from the President, Lord John Russell. His Lordship noticed in order the departments into which the business of the Association is divided:—

1. Jurisprudence and Amendment of the Law. 2. Education. 3. Punishment and Reformation. 4. Public Health. 5. Social Economy. We subjoin the portion of the address relating to Education:—

“I pass to the subject of education. I will not waste your time in examining and refuting the objections which have been made to the general education of the people. It may suffice for me to say that it is education which enables the Scotch laborer's son to compete with the most favoured of his contemporaries, to rise to the highest posts of dignity and power, and to scale the loftiest eminences of science. It is education which enables the United States of America to proceed in their wonderful career, upheld by the most popular institutions, without serious disturbance of law and order. It is education which in England has mainly prevented such tumults as forty years ago broke the peace and alarmed the minds of this country; it is education which has bound the mass of the people to the Throne by the links of an enlightened loyalty. On the subject of education there appears to me to have been a change

somewhat similar to that which took place many years ago on the subject of geology. At that period geologists were divided into Neptunians or Vulcanians, Wernerians or Huttonians, and hot was the dispute regarding the best theory of the formation of the crust of the world. Some wise men said, however, ‘Let us first investigate the facts without troubling ourselves what theory they may confirm or invalidate.’ This has now been done for many years, and assuredly, while controversy has diminished, science has gained by the change. In like manner, popular or national education has been a matter of warm contention among sects and parties till the present year. Sir J. Pakington, who presided in the Department of Education last year, and who deserves the highest credit for his labours on this subject, proposed in the late session of Parliament, with the concurrence of the best friends of the cause, that an address should be presented to the Queen in favour of the appointment of a Royal Commission to inquire into the present state of the education of all classes in England and Wales. The late Government acceded to this proposal, and the present has named commissioners of high reputation and weight in the country, of whom the Duke of Newcastle is the president. From this commission we look for a fair and impartial display of facts, upon the bearing of which Parliament and the nation can decide. Opinion is still in the gristle upon this subject. For my own part, I confess that, anxious as I am for the progress of education, I am quite willing to renounce any desire to establish in this country the system of France, Austria, or Prussia. The freedom of choice in our modes of popular instruction; the noble fountains of literature, sacred and secular, which are open to the youth thirsting for knowledge; the power to range over the writings of Bacon and Shakespeare, and Milton and Addison, seem to me to make our national education, imperfect and incomplete as it is, still far superior to those continental models. I must not omit to mention the great efforts which have been recently made to improve the education of the middle classes. The examinations instituted by the University of Oxford do honour to that venerable body. Nor ought we to pronounce hastily on the result of the first of these examinations. It seems to me apparent that at a time when not only degrees and honours are attached to successful competition, but the very entrance to the civil service and the scientific part of the military service in India is guarded by examiners, it is of the utmost importance to understand rightly